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People's Reporter

A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

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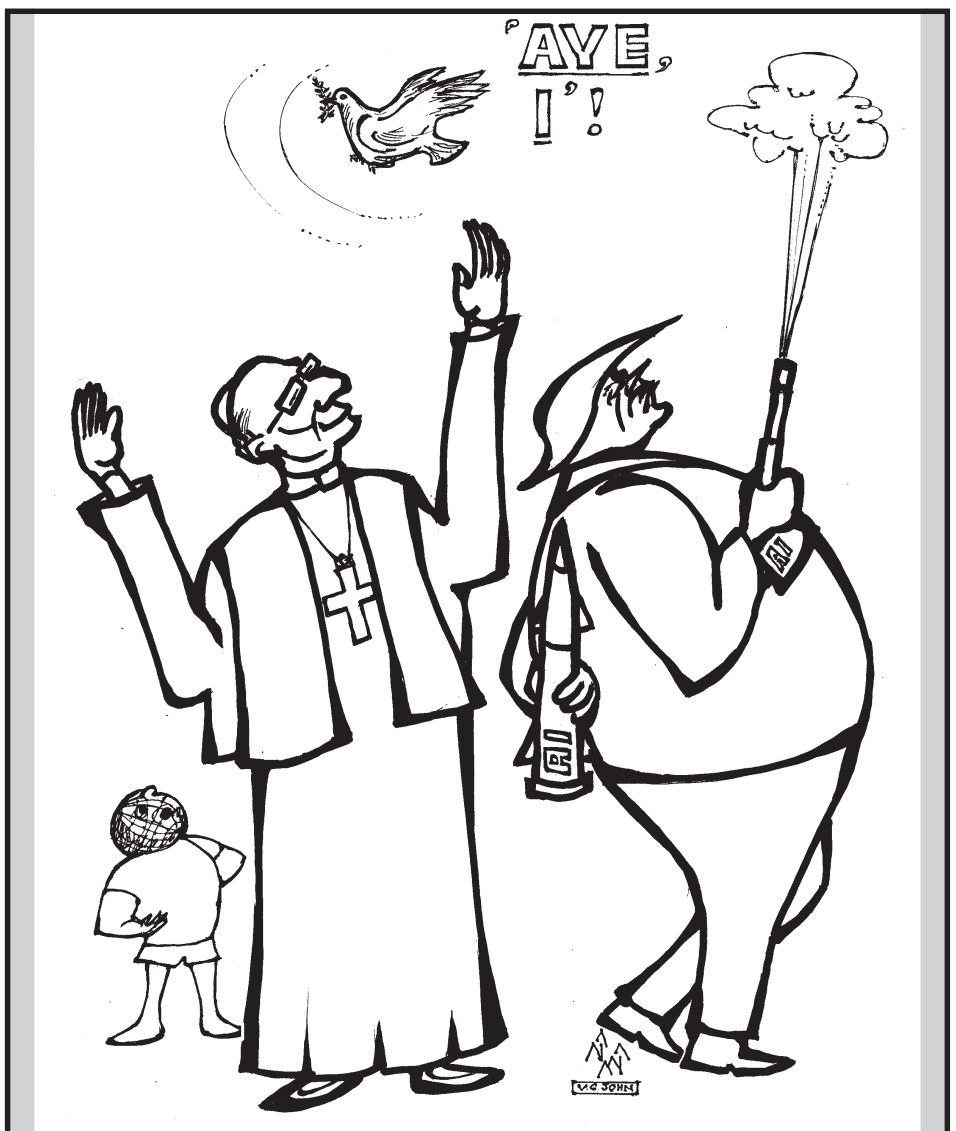

POPE LEO'S FIRST ENCYCLICAL 'MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS' DEFINES THE CHURCH'S STANCE ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE. HE CALLED FOR THE ETHICAL DISARMAMENT OF AI, EMPHASIZING THAT TECHNOLOGY MUST SERVE HUMAN DIGNITY, SOLIDARITY AND HUMAN GOOD RATHER THAN BECOMING AN INSTRUMENT OF WAR. – NEWS

WCC, Caritas, World Vision issue open letter against hunger

"Hunger amid abundance is a moral failure," the letter reads. "No one should suffer or die, especially children, because political decisions prioritise war, division, and short-term interests over human life and the common good."

Harold Segura, World Vision's Regional Director of Faith & Development for Latin America and the Caribbean - and an artist - has provided a work of art. This piece shows open hands holding loaves and fish in a circle – not hoarding, not scarcity, but gift and possibility.

The letter is cosigned by Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, WCC general secretary; Alistair Dutton, secretary general of

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Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society celebrates its seventieth anniversary in 2027

Christian Conference of Asia
an organ and fellowship of churches and ecumenical councils in asia for initiating and facilitating dynamic christian witness and action

Church and ecumenical leaders' international summit to deliberate on emerging ecclesial and ecumenical landscapes in Asia

An International Summit of Church and Ecumenical Leaders to deliberate on 'Emerging Ecclesial and Ecumenical Landscapes in Asia' was organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) as a prelude to the CCA Platinum Jubilee Celebrations in 2027, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 31 May to 3 June 2026.

Addressing church and ecumenical leaders at the International Consultation, the Moderator of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza, called for a renewed ecumenical vision amid the profound changes reshaping both Asia and the ecumenical movement today.

Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza, Moderator of the CCA

Emphasising that churches cannot remain detached from contemporary realities, the Moderator noted, "The churches and the ecumenical movement are neither insulated nor isolated from the world. Developments within societies and local communities directly affect the mission and ministry of the Church, and the ecumenical movement cannot live in a safe cocoon."

Bishop Marigza observed that while historic Christian traditions remain strong, Asia has witnessed the rapid growth of evangelical, Pentecostal, and independent Christian movements, contributing to both greater diversity and new challenges for Christian unity. At the same time, he noted that Asian churches are increasingly exercising indigenous leadership and taking ownership of their missionary calling.

Reflecting on the future of ecumenism in Asia, the Moderator acknowledged that institutional ecumenism faces challenges, including denominational fragmentation and difficulties in engaging younger generations. However, he highlighted that ecumenical engagement is increasingly expressed through diakonia and collaborative action addressing social justice, human rights, migration, ecological concerns, and peacebuilding.

Explaining the objectives of the international consultation, CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara said, "Ahead of CCA's Platinum Jubilee in 2027, this international summit of church leaders will provide an opportunity to reflect on emerging trends related to the ecclesial and ecumenical landscape in Asia and to identify helpful indicators for strengthening the Asian ecumenical movement."

Dr. Mathews George Chunakkara, General Secretary of the CCA

Dr. Chunakara described the emergence of "ecumenical archipelagos" in Asia, where competing networks and structures, often supported by non-Asian mission agencies, operate independently of existing ecumenical frameworks. Rather than strengthening cooperation, these developments risk fragmenting the ecumenical movement and undermining its coherence, coordination, and collective witness.

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8.8 million people being pushed to poverty

The Financial Stability Report-2025 of the Reserve Bank of India revealed that India's economic outlook for 2026 and beyond would be shrouded in uncertainty as the contours of policies reshaping global economic landscape would be fluid. This assessment was made before the appearance of any signs of a major war. The outbreak of the war against Iran by the US and Israel, on 28 February 2026 and its escalation without any sign of an end, raise more threats to global economic situation and life of the people everywhere.

All previous wars have been profitable enterprises for the US. However, the ongoing war against Iran so far has proven to be costly for the US and Israel both financially and politically. Further, different from all the previous wars, the oil-rich West Asian countries, although not a party to the war, suffered severe damages from the war. Bombing on the military bases of the US in these countries caused considerable destruction of infrastructures including oil refineries, and fall in oil revenues owing to the blockade on supply chains. This imposed rise in the price of oil and consumer goods, and the cost of transportation everywhere. Further, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and many other countries that rely heavily on remittances of migrant workers in these countries are already hit hard due to a fall in remittances. These countries are also threatened by the fall in the flow of migrant workers abroad.

This situation is bound to unleash catastrophic impacts on the life of the people everywhere after World War ll. The 'Employment and Social Trends 2026 Report' by ILO released in January 2026, projected global unemployment rate, at a historically low rate of 4.9% - equivalent to 186 million people this year. But the war by erasing this rosy picture is bound to intensify the unemployment situation across the world with severe impacts on low-income countries. According to the projection and estimates by the UNDP, the war in Iran threatens to push 2.5 million people in India into poverty, and the country is projected to experience some loss in her Human Development Index. As per the report, higher fuel, freight and input costs; diminishing house hold purchasing power, rising food insecurity, straining public budgets and weakening livelihoods, as a result of the war, would pull down HDI across Asia and the Pacific.

The number of poverty - stricken people in the world as a result of the war is expected to rise from approximately 1.9 million to nearly 8.8 million, and in India from around 4,00,000 to 2.5 million. The report says that the impacts will be more in South Asia due to its higher exposure to income and price shocks. The escalation of the war would cost Asia-Pacific upto $299 billion. The report states that India will be hit hard as she relies on imports for nearly 90% of her oil needs and more than 90% of LPG imports from West Asia. Along with these impacts on the life of the people, growing balance of trade deficits and falling FDI flow as a result of the war, raise severe threat to macro-economic management of India's economy. What is more disturbing is that although these threats are clear before our eyes, the ruling classes everywhere including those in India do not dare to take strong stand against big powers waging war one after another for their interests.

Thought for the Fortnight

'Wars of nations
are fought to change maps.
But wars of poverty
are fought to map change.'

– Muhammad Ali

Christ in the Rubble

M. Mani Chacko

"Christ in the Rubble", in the era of the Iran war functions as a prophetic warning against moral complacency. It challenges the international community to reject the machinery of war and to recognize the sacred within the very centre of the region's current wreckage.

Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac's theological framework of "Christ in the Rubble," initially articulated during the devastation of Gaza in late 2023, has become a vital ethical lens for critiquing the 2026 war involving Iran, the United States, and Israel. The transition of this concept from the Palestinian context to the broader regional conflagration highlights several core principles regarding social ethics, justice, and the role of faith in times of systemic trauma.

Rev. Dr. M. Mani Chacko,
is a Former General Secretary,
Bible Society of India, Bangalore,
Former Director, Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore,
and Former Principal, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College
and Research Institute, Chennai

Critiquing the Weaponization of Theology

When sacred texts are interpreted through the lens of those holding political or military power, they are frequently weaponized to justify colonial expansion, military campaigns, or social exclusion. **"Christ in the Rubble" disrupts this by demanding a hermeneutic rooted entirely in the margins. It argues that if you want to find Christ in modern conflicts, he is not standing with the perpetrators of violence or within eschatological justifications for war. Rather, he is found buried alongside the victims.**

At the heart of "Christ in the Rubble" is a severe indictment of religious nationalism and the misuse of scripture to sanction state violence. In the immediate context of the 2026 Iran war, Rev. Isaac and allied Palestinian Christian leaders have explicitly denounced the rhetoric of some political and religious figures — particularly those invoking biblical "End Times" prophecies — to justify military escalation and airstrikes.

By applying the "rubble" framework, the narrative of the war is stripped of its sanitized, holy-war veneer. It insists that the divine cannot be co-opted by imperial powers or military command centres. Instead, it places God firmly among the civilian victims buried under the literal consequences of the bombardments, challenging the theological justifications for militarism.

Challenging "Othering"

This theology demands radical solidarity with the marginalized and the victims of violence. When applied to the conflict in Iran, it serves as a counter-narrative to the systemic "othering". Just as "Christ in the Rubble" challenged the dehumanization of Palestinians, it extends that same ethical demand to Iranian civilians and others caught in the regional crossfire. It forces the global community to confront the reality of the destruction, emphasizing that true justice cannot be built on the demonization or annihilation of an "enemy" population. It exposes the hypocrisy of systems that fail to protect marginalized communities and forces a confrontation with the structural racism and coloniality that sustain such violence

Reimagining Hermeneutics for Peace Making

Applying this framework to the current war requires a profound reimagining of biblical hermeneutics for our times. It demands a shift away from a theology of empire toward one of liberation and non-violent resistance, echoing the principles of restorative justice found in texts like the Nazareth Manifesto.

Proponents of this theology stress that the cycle of retaliatory strikes merely breeds further violence. "Christ in the Rubble" argues that true reconciliation requires confronting the systemic structures of injustice that lead to war in the first place. The focus is placed on the costly, difficult work of non-violent resistance and the ultimate need for restitution to restore the dignity of those devastated by the conflict.

In essence, "Christ in the Rubble", in the era of the Iran war, functions as a prophetic warning against moral complacency. **It challenges the international community to reject the machinery of war and to recognize the sacred within the very centre of the region's current wreckage.**

Transformative Shifts

Three transformative shifts emerge as we ponder on the theme "Christ in the Rubble" in how we understand God, the Mission of God and the Role of the Church today.

1.The Theological Shift: Where is God?

Traditional "Theologies of Glory" often look for God in the victory, the strength of the state, or the fulfilment of end-times prophecy. The "Christ in the Rubble" response insists on a ***Theology of the Cross.*** If God became human in a marginalized, occupied land (First Century Palestine), then God is fundamentally "under the rubble" with the civilians of Isfahan and Tehran today.

This theology rejects the idea that any modern nation-state holds a divine mandate to destroy another. It posits that God does not take the side of the F-35 pilot or the missile operator, but stands in solidarity with the child in the basement. **When we bomb a city, we are, in a mystical sense, bombing the body of Christ.**

2. The Missiological Shift: What is God's Mission?

In the context of the 2026 Iran conflict, "God's Mission" is being redefined away from Western-centric expansion and toward *Costly Solidarity*: Mission is not merely about "saving souls" for the afterlife while their bodies are crushed in the present. **It is the holistic defence**

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Prof. Dr. Mammen Varkey,
Editor in Chief, People's Reporter,
Valiyapurayidam,
Post Box No.12,
Mavelikara - 690 101, Kerala, India
Phone : 09446916374
E-mail : mammenvarkey@gmail.com, prprtr@gmail.com

Burning Issues of Today's World: An Overview

V. Mathew Kurian

[Second part of the article 'Burning Issues of Today's World: An Overview']

**Egalitarian economy is a prerequisite for the sound functioning of a democracy.
In today's world, wealth is increasingly concentrating on a few hands.
The marvelous work of Thomas Piketty's 'Capital in the Twenty-First Century' establishes it.
When large segments of the population feel economically abandoned,
faith in the democratic system fades.
This may even inspire radical political movements leading to political instability.**

III. Declining Democratic Institutions

One can trace the roots of democratic institutions to the ancient past particularly of Greece and Rome. In India, we had the village republics, administered democratically. The 1215 Magna Carta was a turning point in the history of democracy. The Westphalian System (1648) was another milestone.

However, European Enlightenment in the 17th-18th centuries laid the intellectual foundations for modern, liberal democratic systems. Individual freedom became the cornerstone of political and economic life. Enlightenment fathers advocated democratic politics. Classical political economists argued for free market economies. United States of America was established as a democratic country. In the decolonised era, especially, after the Second World War, a number of newly formed independent countries like India adopted democracy. **Democracy has become the most acceptable political institution universally. However, in the current times, democracy is exposed to severe challenges. The following are a few of them.**

1. Surging Authoritarianism and Democratic Backsliding

The great classical philosopher and political economist John Stuart Mill defined democracy as a political system with people's discussions. But in today's world, even in the so-called democracies, people have the privilege only to elect and constitute the Government. But in most cases when the elected representatives get power they forget the people and govern autocratically. We have a number of experiences today. USA is claimed as a great democratic country. But Donald Trump as the US President is exercising political power according to his whims and fancies. The entire world is forced to pay the price for it. Even in India, both centrally and regionally, we have so many bitter lessons. The issue related to SIR may be cited as a case in point. In all parts of the world, we find this sort of democratic backsliding. **Populist leaders increasingly use state machineries to silence the media, prune civil liberties and weaken independent judiciaries. This 'democracy capture' normalizes the erosion of checks and balances.**

2. The abuse and misuse of new media

Vested interests are now roguely using information and communication technology with the outcome of instability of citizens to make inability to make informed choices. Unregulated AI tools can artificially manufacture consensus. **Though India claims as a great democratic country, in the world media freedom index our position is only 157. Norway stands at the top.**

3. Widening economic inequality

Egalitarian economy is a prerequisite for the sound functioning of a democracy. In today's world, wealth is increasingly concentrating on a few hands. The marvelous work of Thomas Piketty's 'Capital in the Twenty-First Century' establishes it. When large segments of the population feel economically abandoned, faith in the democratic system fades. This may even inspire radical political movements leading to political instability.

Dr. V. Mathew Kurian is the Joint Director of Dr. K. N. Raj Centre of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala

4. Swelling Cronyism

'Cronyism' refers to the wrong practice of favoring friends and political allies for jobs, contracts, or political positions rather than assessing them on merit. By enabling a privileged few to bypass public institutions, it actively subverts the fundamental ideals of democratic equality and accountability. Democratic countries like USA and India are currently under the grip of crony capitalists.

5. Burgeoning Corruption

Burgeoning corruption functions as a fundamental threat to democracy by dismantling its core pillars: institutional integrity, public trust and the rule of law. When left unchecked, it triggers a destructive cycle that undermines electoral fairness, deepens socio-economic inequality and creates openings for authoritarianism.

IV Slowing down of the Global Economy

The January 2025 Report of the UN observes, "The global economy is at a precarious juncture, marked by heightened trade tensions and elevated policy uncertainty". The recent surge in tariffs - driving the effective U.S. tariff rate up steeply - threatens to raise production costs, disrupt global supply chains and amplify financial turbulence.

According to the latest World Bank Global Economic Prospects, the global economy is projected to grow by 2.6% in 2026. This is visibly below the pandemic historical average of 3.3%. The threats associated with the spread of harms would have economic negative impact on global economic growth. If anything happens to the digital infrastructure embedded in economy, the digital global economy would be worst hit. **There is no economy in the world today free from the slowing down of growth.**

V Swelling Unemployment

Livelihood is the basic need of any human person. Livelihood is closely associated with one's occupation. So job security is critically important to a person's livelihood security. But in today's world due to multiple socio-economic, technological and environmental constraints, job insecurity is becoming a burning issue.

According to the most recent World Employment and Social Outlook of ILO, overall global unemployment rate is 4.9%. 186 million people are globally unemployed, 12.4% of global youth are unemployed, nearly 300 mn workers live in extreme poverty, earning less than $3 a day, and 2.1 bn people work in the informal sector often with limited access to social protection.

**Livelihood is the basic need of any human person.
Livelihood is closely associated with one's occupation.
So job security is critically important to a person's livelihood security.
But in today's world due to multiple socio-economic, technological
and environmental constraints,
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To be continued

In the next issue

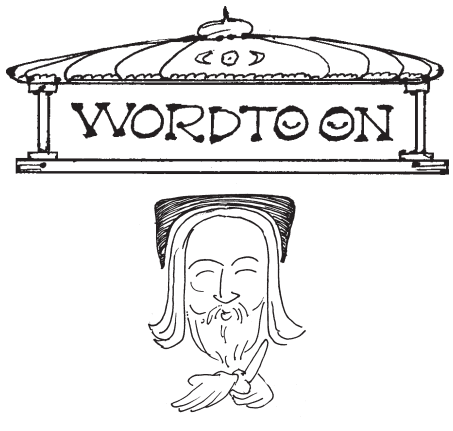
- **Widening Inequality**
- **Galloping Inflation**
- **Deepening Environmental Threats**

WCC, Caritas, World Vision issue open letter against hunger

>>> Contd. from Page 1 Col. 1

Caritas Internationalis; and Andrew Morley, president and CEO of World Vision International.

The letter identifies conflict, displacement, economic instability, and climate shocks as the principal drivers of a crisis that has left approximately 318 million people facing crisis-level hunger in 2026 so far, according to the *Global Report on Food Crises 2026*. An estimated 673 million people – 8.2% of the global population – experienced hunger in 2024, according to the *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025*.



The three organisations call on governments to protect humanitarian access and uphold international humanitarian law, safeguard child nutrition programmes, protect global food supply chains, and prioritise peacebuilding over militarisation.

– WCC News

Climate and Biodiversity - 6

Silence of Broken Relationships

Mathew Koshy Punnackadu

Creation is not sustained solely by human power, technology, or economic systems. It is held together through a vast network of relationships woven by the Creator. Every creature has a role within this community of life. When one thread is removed, the entire fabric becomes weaker.

The Genesis creation narrative reveals a beautiful and deliberate rhythm within creation. Across the first five stages of creation, God establishes an intricate cosmic framework: light is separated from darkness, skies and seas are formed, vegetation covers the earth, celestial bodies mark times and seasons, and waters and skies are filled with living creatures. Only on the sixth day are land animals and human beings brought into existence.

A profound ecological wisdom is embedded within this sequence. The structures created in the first five days are essential for the life that appears on the sixth day. Human beings depend on water, soil, vegetation, climate systems, insects, animals, and countless ecological processes for survival. Yet, these ecological systems could persist even without humanity. God endowed creation with intrinsic worth, interdependence, and a purpose within the wider community of life. **Humanity entered into an already functioning web of relationships and received the responsibility of living in harmony with and sustaining, these sacred relationships.**

This narrative presents an important truth: creation was not designed as isolated parts functioning independently, but as a network of interconnected relationships where every element contributes to the flourishing of the whole.

The Illusion of Conquest

Yet modern history witnessed a period when humanity began to believe that science had finally conquered nature. Following the Second World War, DDT was celebrated as a miracle chemical. It promised to eradicate harmful insects, increase agricultural productivity, and secure food production. Farmers sprayed fields with confidence, and agricultural success appeared inevitable.

Beneath this apparent triumph, however, a silent crisis was unfolding. DDT did not distinguish between harmful pests and beneficial organisms. Pollinators such as bees suffered alongside targeted insects, and toxic substances gradually entered food chains. Bird populations declined as chemicals accumulated in ecosystems, affecting reproduction.

In 1962, marine biologist Rachel Carson issued a prophetic warning through her landmark book ***Silent Spring***. She envisioned a future in which spring would arrive without birdsong, without the hum of insects, and without the vibrant rhythms of nature. **Her warning extended beyond pesticides; it challenged the human assumption that nature can be manipulated without understanding the relationships that sustain life.**

The Echoes of Colony Collapse

Decades later, between 2006 and 2007, concerns about pollinator decline became dramatically visible through the phenomenon known as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). Bee colonies suddenly experienced significant losses across many regions. Scientists later recognised that this crisis resulted from multiple interacting factors: parasitic mites, viral infections, habitat destruction, climate instability, pesticide exposure, and stresses associated with industrial agricultural practices.

Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu is presently the Commissioner, Climate Justice and Sustainable Development of the World Council of Churches. Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu is the Project Director of the CSI Community Development Programme And the Exceutive Editor of the International Journal of Climate Justice.

The consequences became immediately visible. California's almond farms, which depend heavily on bee pollination, faced shortages of pollinating colonies. Pollination costs increased, crop production became uncertain, and farmers experienced serious economic challenges. **Humanity suddenly discovered what had long been taken for granted: the silent and unpaid labour of bees.**

Biodiversity as a Climate Justice Issue

This crisis reveals a central truth about biodiversity and climate justice. Bees are not insignificant participants in the story of life; they are foundational partners in sustaining ecosystems. **Nearly one-third of global food production depends directly or indirectly on pollination.** Fruits, vegetables, nuts, and many crops rely upon the quiet work of pollinators.Without them, flowers may bloom, but fruits may not appear. Plant reproduction becomes vulnerable, and human food systems become increasingly fragile.

Ecological disruption rarely affects all people equally. Small-scale farmers, Indigenous communities, and economically marginalised populations often bear the greatest burden of environmental degradation, despite contributing the least to ecological destruction. **Climate justice, therefore, is not merely an environmental concern; it is also a matter of social and moral responsibility.**

A Theology of Interconnectedness

This crisis challenges humanity to rethink its relationship with creation. Creation is not sustained solely by human power, technology, or economic systems. It is held together through a vast network of relationships woven by the Creator. Every creature has a role within this community of life. When one thread is removed, the entire fabric becomes weaker.

Humanity is gradually discovering a fundamental principle of life: when bees disappear, flowers may continue to bloom, but branches may remain bare. Such failures remind us that our survival is deeply connected even to the smallest forms of life.

The call before humanity is not to dominate nature but to rediscover a sacred partnership with creation. Rachel Carson's silence is not merely the absence of birdsong; it is the silence of broken relationships, the fading harmony of life itself.

Seeking climate justice, therefore, means listening carefully to that silence, acknowledging human arrogance, and participating in the sacred work of restoring the relationships that God declared "very good." ●

The Genesis narrative presents an important truth: creation was not designed as isolated parts functioning independently, but as a network of interconnected relationships where every element contributes to the flourishing of the whole.

Christ in the Rubble

>>> Contd. from Page 2 Col. 4

of the *Imago Dei* (Image of God) in every Iranian and Middle Eastern life.

A key part of the mission of God today is speaking truth to "Empire." This involves calling out the religious rhetoric used to justify the February 28th strikes and challenging the silence of global church bodies.

3. The Ecclesiological Shift: What is The Church?

What does it mean to be the Church when the world is at war? The response suggests a "Church of/in the Rubble". The Church must remain a "third space" that does not swear fealty to any military power. Its primary allegiance is to the Prince of Peace, which often puts it at odds with nationalistic fervour.

The Church's liturgy should be the "liturgy of the broken." It is the church's duty to weep with those who weep, rather than providing easy theological justifications for "necessary" geopolitical strikes.

Moving Forward

This theological response demands that we look at the smoke over the Iranian skyline not as a "strategic necessity," but as a call to repentance and a reminder of our shared humanity.

Beyond scholarly reflection, "Christ in the Rubble" functions as a living act of protest. It embodies the Palestinian concept of *Sumud* (steadfast resilience) by refusing to let the suffering of the vulnerable be ignored or normalized.

It challenges communities of faith and advocates for justice to adopt a genuinely prophetic voice. Rather than remaining neutral or baptizing the machinery of war, the theme argues that true ethical fidelity requires calling out the architects of violence — much like ancient prophets confronting kings. It reclaims lament not as an act of passive despair, but as a profound form of resistance.

Ultimately, the enduring relevance of "Christ in the Rubble" is its uncompromising diagnostic test for any modern social ethic or theology: if a belief system does not prioritize the physical safety and liberation of those crushed at the bottom of the geopolitical order, it has lost its moral compass. As of May 24, 2026, the United States and Iran are reportedly closing in on a peace agreement to end the ongoing war, though the situation remains tense and a final deal has not yet been signed.

***'Christ in the Rubble'* challenges communities of faith and advocates for justice to adopt a genuinely prophetic voice. Rather than remaining neutral or baptizing the machinery of war, the theme argues that true ethical fidelity requires calling out the architects of violence — much like ancient prophets confronting kings. It reclaims lament not as an act of passive despair, but as a profound form of resistance.**

Let us pray the following prayer:

God of Peace and Justice

Realising that "Christ is in the Rubble", we lift up to You the regions of our world fractured by war, violence, and division. Where there is destruction, we pray for the restoration of hope; where there is hostility, we pray for the courage to seek reconciliation.

Help us to realise that Christ is in the Rubble and therefore to reimagine a war free world where swords are beaten into ploughshares and where the oppressed are set free. May peace in our time be not merely a temporary absence of violence, but a deep, enduring reality built on a foundation of true justice and equity for all people as Christ envisages. Amen. ●

Making Sense of the Wars in the World Today

Cynthia Stephen

In several parts of the world masses of people are groaning under multiple burdens: war, petrol prices, climate change causing extreme weather, rising unemployment, youth disconnect. Churches are either overflowing with seekers who are eager to listen to celebrity speakers preaching a prosperity gospel or shrinking from a loss of younger members and families.

On the international political platforms, we see unbelievable things like "regime change": an elected President of a sovereign country kidnapped from his presidential suite, with his wife, and with the complicity of his bodyguards and ferried into the aggressor country to face criminal charges there. The same aggressor also speaks openly of annexing nearby/neighbouring countries like Greenland and Cuba. The international community and the comity of nations seem to have collapsed. At another level, the aggressor joins hands with cronies to engage in criminal acts of sexual exploitation of minors, mostly girls but also boys, over decades. And one of those cronies is an associate of a country which was the political ally of the agressor's country over a century. And thereby hangs a tale.

Based on a flawed and disputable reading of the Old Testament, a political ideology, Zionism, spawns an international conspiracy by post WW2 Allies, also former colonial powers like France and Britain, to carve up portions of the Middle East which were under their dominion. And an ancient population, settled for at least two millennia on their ancestral lands, experience the slow and steady ingress of a section of humans claiming divine right over their lands. The story of the creation of the country of Israel during the mid 20th C - which also saw the gradual roll-back of European colonialism over countries in Asia and Africa - is the culmination of a particular reading of the Jewish and Christian scriptures which gained currency in just the last couple of centuries. For a religion like Christianity which claims that its scriptures are the best-attested by historicity and physical existence over the last couple of millennia, it is a truly dismal collapse of reasoning and scholarship.

This has had catastrophic results globally: loss of millions of mostly innocent civilians, especially women and children, and the devastation of entire landscapes and cities.

Dear Reader, do you think I exaggerate? How can this be possible, do you ask? Read on.

The reference is to the work of the building of a certain political understanding based on a particular theological reading of portions of the old testament, made popular over just the last two hundred years or less, known as **Dispensational Theology,** as opposed to the well-attested understanding which had been studied and written about since the first Century, over two thousand years, well known and accepted as **Covenant theology** since the time of the early church.

Dispensational Theology was first articulated by John Nelson Darby, a priest of the Church of Ireland, by developing some existing ideas of historical eras or Dispensations - which were read into human history, by organising them into a distinct eschatological scheme. His ideas proved very influential and he became active in a sect known as the Plymouth Brethren.

Dispensationalism includes the idea of the Pre-millenial Rapture, which proposes that Christ will secretly return to take believers, both living and (resurrected) dead, to heaven with him in an event known as the Rapture, before a seven-year period of Tribulation and the physical Second coming of Jesus. Darby's writings had a very lasting impact, mainly after an American, C I Scofield, produced a reference Bible in which the King James Version was embellished with commentary on the text on the same page, including cross references which enabled chain referencing called the Scofield

'Those who are proponents of Covenant Theology declare that there is no justification for war, as the Bible says that the revenge is of God, that we are living in the age of Grace'.

Ms.Cynthia Stephen is an independent Journalist and gender and development social policy researcher, based in Bangalore. She is also the Founder President, TEDS Trust, which works for women's empowerment

Reference Bible, published by Oxford University Press in 1909. Its 1917 edition continues to be one of the most popular in the UK. It came at a time in history where people were still recovering from the WW1. Theodor Herzl is an Austro-Hungarian journalist, the founder of political Zionism. His text, Der Judenstaat, proposed the setting up of a Jewish state to counter the growing anti-Semitism in Europe.

In 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, supporting a homeland for Jews in Palestine. Thus we see several forces : biblical interpretation, its teaching in UK and the US, the publication of the reference bible by Oxford University, and Balfour declaration were rapid historical developments which hastened the growth of the idea of a homeland for the Jews being not only biblical but also historical and political. The state of Israel came into being in 1948, and was seen as fulfilment of biblical prophesy. Millions of Palestinians, including not only Muslims but even Christians, descendants of believers from the time of Christ have been displaced since then.

D L Moody, popular Bible teacher and preacher, took Dispensational theology to the larger evangelical movement in America. It was taught in Moody Bible Institute and entered popular imagination through popular books and films, like the Left Behind series on the Rapture.

Cut to the present: these ideas grew in the evangelical church in the US and UK, and larger political change brought Christian conservatives to power in the the US. Deeply enmeshed Jewish lobbies in US finance, films, media and politics became more influential, even as Trump won a second term. Both the pro and anti Jewish lobbies became active in the US. While the repression of the Palestinian people by the Jews in Gaza continued, in one decisive moment on October 7th 2023, when Hamas, an armed group of Palestinians, breached Israeli defences, coordinating over land, sea and air taking them by complete surprise. Over 1000 Israelis were killed and several taken hostage. This caused severe retaliation and sparked a war in Gaza which still continues with the coordination of the Presidents of both the US and Israel.

At the same time, over in the US, there were court battles over the release of some material known as the Epstein files, which were alleged to contain very incendiary material which would implicate the cream of political and business elites in the US and several other countries in a number of horrendous crimes. Trump had promised to release the files after his elections, and they eventually were, with a lot of incriminating details redacted. But even these were enough to raise the hackles of everyone: horrendous crimes against dozens if not children over many years, by many of the leaders of business and politics not only in the US but also other countries including many notable from India! Some of the survivors, now adults, gave up their right to privacy and came out in public to denounce the perpetrators by name in the US media!

In order to manage the situation (headline management), Trump, apparently urged by Netanyahu, attacked Iran and sparked another conflagration which has now sent the global economy into a tail-spin due to Iran's blocking transport of oil across the straits of Hormuz.

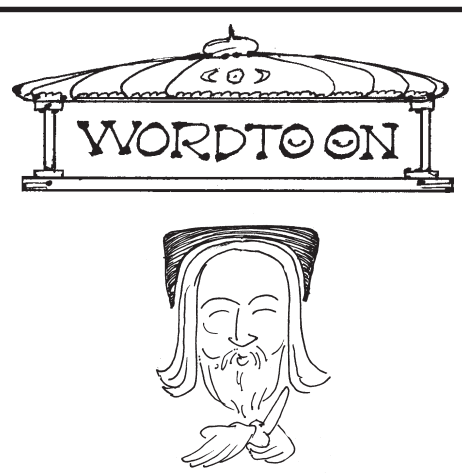
Dispensationalits strongly support this war because according to them, war in the Gulf and against Iran, is part of the Biblical prophesy of the end times: the establishment of Israel and the return of the Jews, the possibility of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. The resumption of sacrifices in Jerusalem is said to hasten the pre-millenial Rapture of the believers. Thus there is complete support and encouragement of the hostilities by the US and Israel against both Iran and the Palestinians! On the other hand, 'those who are proponents of Covenant Theology declare that there is no justification for war, as the Bible says that the revenge is of God, that we are living in the age of Grace'.

Another very important and decisive difference is the view of Israel: while Dispensational theology believes that Israel and the church are distinct, Covenant theology believes that all the believers are the Church and Israel has no special place in the Millennial kingdom, because Jews do not believe in the Salvific work of Jesus Christ.

I hope that I have been able to establish, simply and clearly, the connection between the beliefs of Dispensational theology and the present day chaos at the world level.

Based on my own research and the book. 'The Dark Side of Dispensational Theology' By Rev. Dr. D. Manohar Chandra Prasad. Bangalore, 2026, Omega Book World Rs. 125/- ISBN 978-93-47196-90-4

Dispensational theology believes that Israel and the church are distinct, Covenant theology believes that all the believers are the Church and Israel has no special place in the Millennial kingdom, because Jews do not believe in the Salvific work of Jesus Christ.

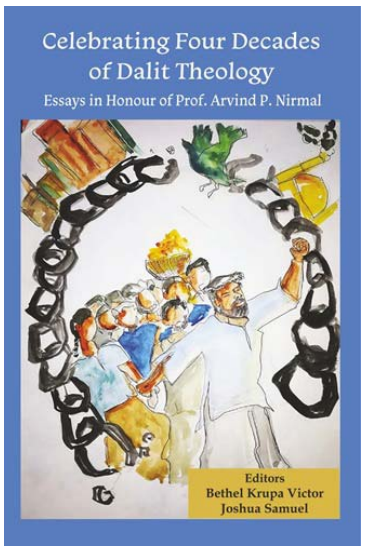


Young People's Column

Book Review

'Celebrating Four Decades of Dalit Theology

The book 'Celebrating Four Decades of Dalit Theology' promises to serve as a valuable resource to theological students, scholars, and lay readers who wish to expand their knowledge of specific subjects relating to the study of Dalit Theology or simply to remain current on recent developments in the field of Indian theological articulation. It is a valuable resource for students engaging in the Dalit causes.


Celebrating Four Decades of Dalit Theology
Essays in Honour of Prof. Arvind P. Nirmal
Editors
Bethel Krupa Victor
Joshua Samuel

Celebrating Four Decades of Dalit Theology: Essays in Honour of Prof. Arvind P Nirmal

Editors

Bethel Krupa Victor and Joshua Samuel

ISPCK, 2025,
Pages: 272.
ISBN: 978-81-19434-31-2.

Dalit theology is a significant theological school of Indian contextual thinking that focuses primarily on its task of countering caste oppression and advocating for liberation. As a specialised discipline founded on the pathetic experiences of Dalit communities, Dalit theology has been construed as an ongoing vocation that brings together like-minded theologians, activists, pastors and lay leaders to combat caste oppression and denounce all systems and practices that stigmatise, criminalise, exclude and dehumanise people because of their Dalit identity.

The historic inception of Dalit theology goes back to a candid lecture given in *1981* – the groundbreaking vice-presidential lecture, incorrectly entitled '*Towards a Sudra Theology'*, delivered by *Prof. Arvind P. Nirmal* at the valedictory ceremony of the Carey Society of the *United Theological College (UTC)* in Bangalore. Since then, during the last four decades, Christian faith articulation has been reshaped and reconfigured, candidly and lucidly, through the systematic and poignant efforts and through the indelible contributions of a set of erudite Dalit contextual theologians in India.

This splendid book of *'Celebrating Five Decades of Dalit Theology'* is an excellent collection of scholarly works by church leaders and theologians to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Prof. Nirmal's iconic lecture. This incisive compendium comprises of selected papers presented at the two-day online seminar held in 2022 to mark the fortieth anniversary of the birth of Dalit theology, compelling Bible studies on Dalit pathos and *Prof. A. P. Nirmal memorial annual lectures* delivered at *U.T.C.* in recent years by eminent scholars in the field of Dalit theology. Against this background, each part of the book elaborates different aspects of Dalit epistemology, such as theology, biblical hermeneutics and history, and profusely illustrates the need for celebrating Dalit contextual faith explorations to be an alternative discourse in order that they should remain counter theologies of grassroot human experiences. **As explained by *Bethel Krupa Victor and Joshua Samuel* - the editors of this volume, the work is designed to orient the readers to the field of Dalit theology with all of its shifting areas of foci and all-encompassing scholarship so that the readers will perceive it as an exciting academic enterprise that continues to find its rightful place at the cutting edge of global theological scholarship *(pp. 4).* Without any doubt, one can say that the editors have certainly succeeded in that endeavour.**

Mr. Lilu Paul pursues Bachelor of Divinity Studies at Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in Chennai.

Let me now whet the reader's appetite by exploring the book in detail. The work is structured in three parts. The first segment of the book is a compilation of four lectures delivered at the United Theological College in recent years. In each essay, much attention has been made by the authors to reverberate on the historic trajectories and the rich interdisciplinary leanings of Dalit theology. However, like any major compendium of this type, there will naturally be essays that readers find more useful and convincing than others. In that sense, *Y. T. Vinayaraj's 'Dalit Theology of Religion(s)'* is worth mentioning, and it accurately describes the need for Dalit theology to surpass the normativity of Christianity and reject the theological tenets of transcendentalism to place religion as an emancipatory political identity based on social consciousness and a shared moral order *(pp. 30 - 45).* Instead of offering superficial affirmations on the Dalit cause, Vinayarj posits Ambedkar's philosophy of religion as a guide for the search of a renewed social identity and social agency for Dalits, thereby calls for a cause what he might mean to be a *radical Dalit theology of religion(s).*

In the same vein, **in the second part of the book,** *Joshua Samuel* overhauls the need for decolonising Dalit theology and presenting a '*Dalit comparative theology of the cross'* by revisiting the seminal works of his predecessors *Sathinathan Clarke* and *Joseph Prabhakar Dayam,* who attempted an interreligious project in the Dalit stratum with much precision and cohesion in their works. Following his predecessors, Joshua delineates and interprets the mythical story of Renuka as a lament of remembrance and refurbishes it with the distressing realities of Dalits in the light of the crucifixion of Jesus, who was a colonised Jew murdered under the might of the Roman empire *(pp. 123).*

Joshua gives a luminous meditation account based on John 9:1-41, in the bible studies section as well, focusing on the *'savarna gaze and harassment against Dalits' (pp. 228).* Speaking from his own personal experience of being attempted to be silenced by dominant caste theologians in academia, he chastises the crudity and ruthlessness of dominant powers even in the faith community and theological education enterprises and inspires the readers to be opened up as barefaced dissenters of '*savarna patronisation'.*

Dalit hermeutical explorations also find a significant place in the book. They are in the thrid and final part of the book. *Johnson Thomaskutty,* a professor of Biblical studies in *U. T. C.*, contends that Dalit hermeneutics requires a polyvalent analysis in order to extend its liberative potential to be on the vanguard of justice *(pp. 193).* His *Dalit reading of the Johannine narrative of the invalid person (John 5:1-47)* is an indispensable resource in this regard. Along with *Thomaskutty, K. Jesurathnam* and *Chilkuri Vasantha Rao* also present prescriptive essays on Dalit hermeneutics, finding inspiration from the Deuteronomic creed and Psalm 22, respectively.

This work wouldn't have been enjoyable if the reader missed the essays that show the personal feelings and charisma of two writers in the book who physically witnessed the historic lecture of Prof. Arvind P. Nirmal as students of his at UTC, namely *Deenabandhu Manchala and Jayakiran Sebastian. Jayakiran Sebastian writes:* "The fact that during the question and answer session following the "Towards a Sudra Theology" lecture, which also marked his farewell to the United Theological College since he was leaving to go to Maharashtra, in response to a question about theological specificity, he responded "All theologies start off as local, and then they tend to universalize themselves". I also remember that in response to a comment made by the chair, Principal Dr. Joshua Russell Chandran, he turned to him and said "Once certain people climbed coconut trees, and now they climb the poles of power"

The book 'Celebrating Four Decades of Dalit Theology' promises to serve as a valuable resource to theological students, scholars, and lay readers who wish to expand their knowledge of specific subjects relating to the study of Dalit Theology or simply to remain current on recent developments in the field of Indian theological articulation. It is a valuable resource for students engaging in the Dalit causes. ●

Christian Conference of Asia
CCA an organ and fellowship of churches and ecumenical councils in asia for initiating and facilitating dynamic christian witness and action

Church and ecumenical leaders' international summit to deliberate on emerging ecclesial and ecumenical landscapes in Asia

>>> Contd. from Page 1 Col. 4

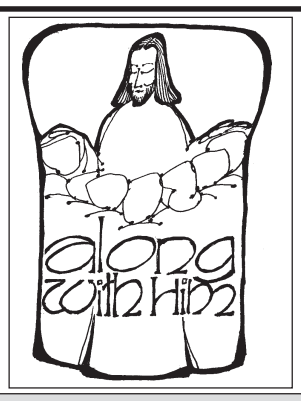
Bishop Samuel Azariah of the Church of Pakistan emphasised that ecclesial unity in Asia must be understood within the social, political, cultural, and religious realities facing churches across the region. While the modern ecumenical movement emerged from efforts to foster Christian cooperation in mission, denominational divisions and fragmentation continue to undermine Christian witness in Asian countries.

The three-day international consultation examined the subjects 'Challenges to Ecclesial Unity and Mission in Unity in Asia'; 'Synodality and Ecumenism: Ecclesial Unity for Effective Witness in Asia' ; 'Migration from Homelands and the Expansion of Diaspora Churches Beyond Borders'; 'Challenges to Wider Ecumenism Amidst the Changing Landscape of Interreligious Relations in Asia'; and the 'Changing Landscape of the Global Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century: Prospects and Challenges from Ecumenical, Missional, and Confessional Family Perspectives'.

More than 70 church and ecumenical leaders from across Asia, Europe and North America, attended the international consultation at Payap University in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Participants in the consultation included church and ecumenical leaders representing CCA member churches and councils, members of CCA Executive and Programme Committees, representatives of mission agencies and ecumenical partner organisations, international and regional ecumenical organisations including the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as representatives of the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA).

– CCA News



566

Mammen Varkey

Post Easter Reflections - 5

The Path of the Cross will Lead to Resurrection - 5

They were not sent for 'fishing fish'

"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you". When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, even so I send you". And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." John 20:19-23 (RSV)

In spite of the prolonged and persuasive interactions, and even heated arguments, the other disciples had with Thomas - as we shared in the last reflections – they could not convince him that their Master had actually risen up. And that the Master who had risen up was actually, still, bearing the print of the nails in his hands and the marks of the wounds in his side. So, the Risen Master had to present himself to Thomas, one of his chosen disciples, and to offer himself to be tested by the disciple himself by putting his finger into the nail prints and the wound--marks in his side.

Thomas' Encounter with the Risen Master

Having actually seen the Risen Master with the marks of the nails in his hands and of the wounds in his side **Thomas had to reconcile himself with the truth that the Risen Master was one who was still bearing the marks of his crucifixion.** Jesus told Thomas, "…. do not be faithless, but believing". John 20:27. Usually, it is taken as a call just to believe that their Master had risen up. **But, more importantly, the Risen Master was telling them that the One who had risen up was with the marks of the nails and he would lead them in the establishment of the kingdom of God,' the 'rule of the Parent God', along the way of the cross.**

Agonizing Reflections

Naturally, after their encounter with their Risen Master, Thomas and the other disciples must have immersed themselves in the deliberations, reflections, on the truth that their Risen Lord was One who was bearing the marks of his crucifixion, and that they also had to travel along the path of the cross, if they wanted to continue to be with him. They must have been having a terribly agonizing time of search, reflection. **Thomas would have insistently told the other disciples that the One with the marks of the nails, and not with crown on his head, would not be able to lead them in the establishment of the 'kingdom' of God.**

What was the result of Thomas' interaction with other disciples and of their collective deliberations?

Generally, this aspect is not well reflected upon or thought about. How much influence the interactions had on the disciples is well revealed in the chapter 21 of the Gospel According to John.

Postscript

The chapter 21 is a postscript. John was very particular that all the readers must, definitely, take seriously the disciples' response to the appearance and the interactions of their Risen Master with marks of the nails in his hands, and of the wounds in his side. **So John re-opened the book that he had closed with the chapter 20 and added one more chapter.** Perhaps, everyone might not agree with this view. Still, according to the New Testament scholar C. K. Barret, "It is evident that Gospel was never published without its last chapter, and this fact, together with its stylistic resemblance to the rest of the Gospel, suggests that it was a supplement added by the evangelist himself. "***Peake's Commentary on the Bible Page 867 (Edition 1977).***

Definitely, they were not sent for 'fishing fish'

What is it that John narrates in the chapter 21? In chapter 20, it is narrated that the disciples met their Risen Master in Jerusalem. But in chapter 21, we see them in Galilee! " Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, " I am going fishing". They said to him, 'We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat…." John 21:2 & 3 (RSV). Isn't it most surprising, rather shocking, that those who were 'sent', were seen going for 'fishing'. We read "……as the Father has sent me, even so I send you".

John 20:21. Definitely, they were not sent for 'fishing'! After their long and hard interactions with Thomas and among themselves, the disciples went to Galilee! There Peter said, 'I am going fishing'. They had been sent - "…… I send you" John 20:21 - not for 'catching fish' but to start the mission of 'catching men' in Galilee. But unbelievably, Peter did not hesitate to tell out that he was going for fishing! In fact, when Jesus had, during his public ministry, told "…… the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." Mark. 8:31, Peter had rebuked his Master in utter rejection of the 'path of the cross'. In that context, the Master had been compelled to call one of his chief disciples, 'Satan', the embodiment of the total negation of 'God'. And then the Master had to publicly and powerfully state, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life would lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's, will save it." Mark 8:34, 35. And through his life, journeying along the path of cross, their Master had actually showed them the way of life. But then, after the Master was caught, Peter had told publicly "I do not know him". Luke. 22:37. **It was Peter's rejection of the path of the cross shown by their Master Jesus for the 'fishing of men'.**

Went for fishing

After the interaction with Thomas, and getting back to Galilee, Peter decided to go 'for fishing' and refused to be engaged in the task entrusted to him too, by the Master, that is, ***the 'fishing of men'***. Very significantly, according to John, it is Thomas who first decided to go with Peter. John 21:2. In most other contexts, the first to join Peter were either John and Jacob or Andrew.

Critically Important

It is critically important to reflect on how the Risen Master encountered his beloved disciples who left him and went for 'fishing'. ●

To be continued

LAMP UNTO THE FEET, LIGHT UNTO THE PATH

Divine Presence At The Workplace

A. V. Itty

Ruth 2:1-4

"Sometime later Boaz himself arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the workers: "The Lord be with you", he said. The Lord bless you!" they answered" (v.4).

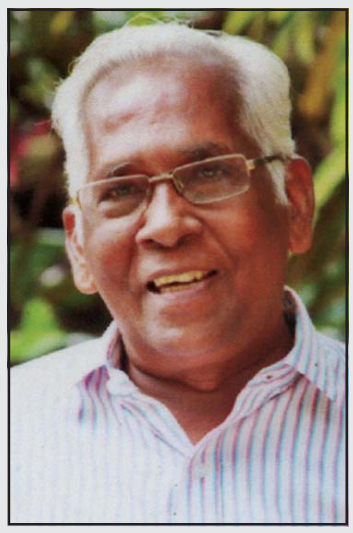
Different societies have different notions about employer-employee relationship. The employer is looked upon as an exploiter of the employees and the employees are considered anti-employer in the capitalist order. But the picture the Scripture portion that we meditate upon, gives is quite different. We see here a relationship between the employees and the employer, based on divine love. Boaz does not speak to his workers using a language of authority or arrogance. Instead he uses a language of love, brotherhood and concern. The response of the workers is also similar.

Boaz acknowledges that the wealth and the land belong to the Lord and his workers are, as he himself is, the children of God. Their response reveals a warmth that conveys their recognition of him as their benefactor and brother. Boaz didn't keep God away from his wealth and areas of activity. The Lord was present in his farming, his toils and the labour relationships. This is a great lesson we should learn from Boaz.

We will have to see life in its totality. The approach of true spirituality is that everything is compliant to God, and that there is no distinction between the spiritual and the physical, and that life and all its activities are an inseparable whole. Everything belongs to God. Humans are only His stewards. Each one is for everyone and each one should carry out his/her responsibilities, submitting himself/herself to God. In such places, as revealed in the above Scripture portion, relationships would be warm, pleasant and based on love and mutually. Are we led by such considerations in our relationships? May God help us for that. ●

Food For Thought:

Human beings are only the stewards of the resources, which God has given for the good of all!



Prof. A. V. Itty, former Professor of English at Bishop Moore College, Mavelikara, is, now, engaged in the Evangelical, and Educational Ministry undertaken by ADORE in the Rayagada Dist. of Odisha. 94950 17850 (Mob)

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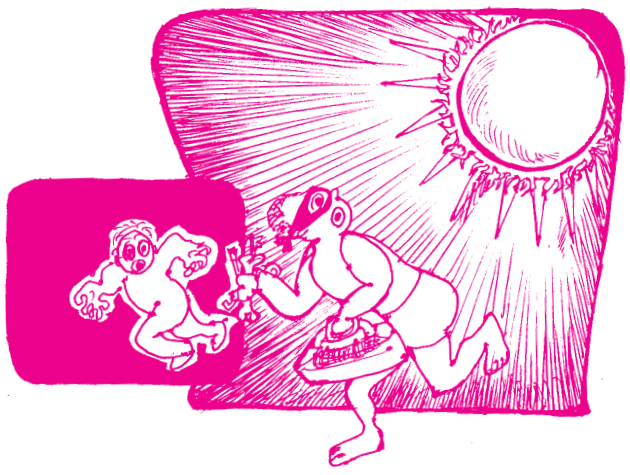


"We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of light"

– Plato

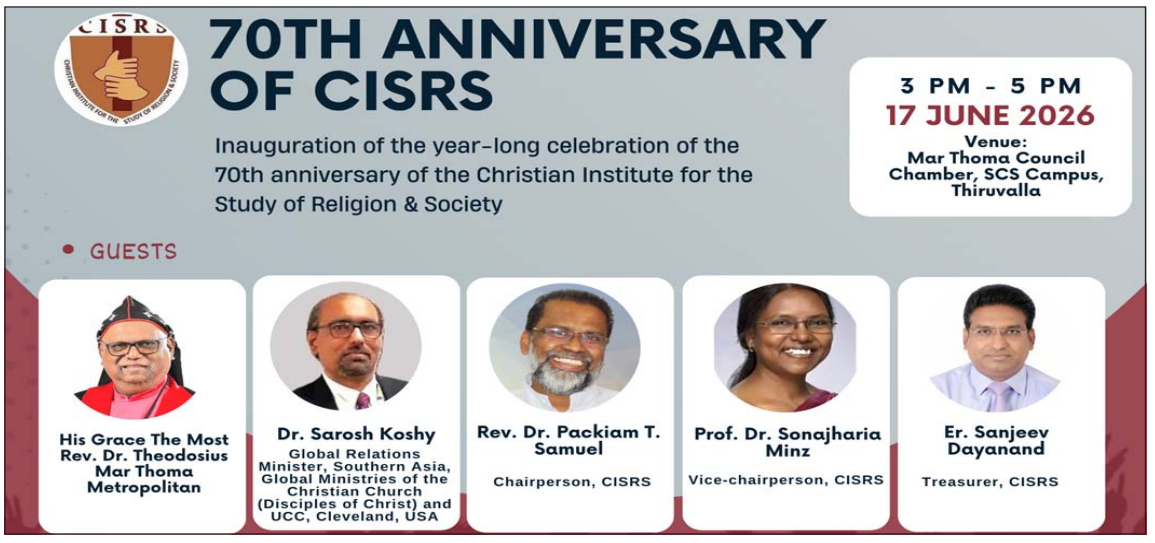
Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society celebrates its seventieth anniversary in 2027

The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS), a pioneering Christian research institute in India, will celebrate its seventieth anniversary in 2027. To kick off this milestone, we are organizing a gathering of our friends and supporters to inaugurate a year-long celebration aimed at revitalizing our mission in South Asia.

This event is scheduled for Wednesday, June 17, 2026, from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM at the Mar Thoma Council Chamber, SCS Campus, Thiruvalla. Dr. Sarosh Koshy, Global Minister of Southern Asia Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and UCC, Cleveland, USA, will deliver the keynote address.

You are cordially invited to join us for this special occasion.

Rev. Dr. Y. T. Vinayaraj, Director, CISRS, Bangalore


CISRS
70TH ANNIVERSARY OF CISRS
Inauguration of the year-long celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion & Society
3 PM - 5 PM
17 JUNE 2026
Venue:
Mar Thoma Council Chamber, SCS Campus, Thiruvalla
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His Grace The Most Rev. Dr. Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan
Dr. Sarosh Koshy
Global Relations Minister, Southern Asia, Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and UCC, Cleveland, USA
Rev. Dr. Packiam T. Samuel
Chairperson, CISRS
Prof. Dr. Sonajharia Minz
Vice-chairperson, CISRS
Er. Sanjeev Dayanand
Treasurer, CISRS

Changing Ecclesial Landscape in Asia: Challenges to the Ecumenical Movement

Mathews George Chunakara

It has often been observed that the ecclesial landscape is undergoing a profound transformation. This transformation varies across continents and regions, both in the Global South and in the traditional centres of Western Christendom. For more than two decades, it has also been widely noted that the "centre of gravity of Christianity" has moved from Europe and North America to the Global South - Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The shift in the "centre of gravity of Christianity" is understood in two ways: demographically and spiritually. The Global South is experiencing growth in both respects. Indeed, Christianity has been growing at an unprecedented rate in these regions, characterised by a dramatic southward shift in Christianity's demographic centre. Academic research tracking worldwide Christian demographic trends projected a total Christian population of 2.6 billion in 2025. While Christianity has been growing most rapidly in the Global South, the number of religiously unaffiliated individuals has grown in the West. Pentecostal and evangelical movements, in particular, are expanding more rapidly than other faith groups in the Global South. This phenomenal growth of ecclesial communities in the Global South indicates that Christianity is expanding in new and dynamic ways, and the global Christian population is projected to increase by nearly 3 billion or more over the next 20 years.

The decline of Christianity in traditional Western Christendom is more evident than ever. A steady decline in institutional church attendance has been recorded across Europe. Several church ministers in Western churches have observed that "believing without belonging" has become one of the greatest challenges facing Christianity today. At the same time, another category, those who may be described as "belonging, but not believing", is also growing in the West. The increasing number of "Nones", referring to people who identify as having "No Religion", has become a common trend in traditional Western Christendom. In contrast, the rapid growth of Christianity is more visible in the Global South. For example, sub-Saharan Africa, now home to more Christians than any other region, has 62% of practising Christians. This is a dramatic increase from roughly 10 million in 1900 to over 734 million in 2026. Asia is likewise experiencing demographic growth in Christianity and signs of spiritual renewal, although the pace of growth is not as rapid as that seen in Africa.

Today, the epicentre of global Christian mission has increasingly shifted to the Global South, including the vast Asian continent. Vibrant indigenous "reverse mission" movements—led by countries such as South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, and China—are now deploying thousands of missionaries across Asia and beyond. This shift from a Western-led mission model to a polycentric reality, where "mission from anywhere to anywhere" is the norm today.

Dr. Mathews George Chunakara is the General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). He previously served the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the Geneva Secretariat as Asia Secretary and Director of the Commission on International Affairs.

Christianity in Asia: Changing Ecclesial Landscape

Christianity, the world's largest religion, originated in Asia, and today Christians make up approximately 8-10% of the total Asian population. The Christian community is highly diverse, spanning ancient Christian traditions such as those in Antioch and other parts of West Asia (today's Middle East), the St. Thomas Christians in India, and massive and growing populations in East and Southeast Asia. Although the modern colonial term "Middle East" is commonly used to describe the geographical region associated with the birthplace of Christianity, the region in fact includes the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey — all part of West Asia, where Christianity began 2,000 years ago. It was on Asian soil that God revealed and fulfilled the divine plan of salvation from the beginning. In "the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4), God sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Saviour, who took flesh in Asia!

Although Christianity in Asia dates back to the first century, for many centuries, people across Asia came to know Jesus Christ through Western channels.In many parts of Asia, Christian missions arrived alongside Western commercial, political, and military advances. As a result, Christianity in Asia has often been associated with the Western colonial era. Renowned historian, scholar and former Indian diplomat, K. M. Panikkar, in his book *Asia and Western Dominance,* devoted one chapter to the "Christian Mission" in Asia. Panikkar observed about the failure of the Christian missions and predicted that the end of colonialism would be the end of Christian mission, and that with the disappearance of European dominance, Christianity would assume its natural position as one of the religions of Asia, and missionaries would cease to have any special or privileged position. Nearly eight decades after Panikkar made these observations, we are able both to look back and to assess the present realities concerning the role of Christianity in Asia.

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To be continued

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A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

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